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# The Mothers

Edward F. Hayward



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# THE MOTHERS



# THE MOTHERS

EDWARD F. HAYWARD

*And I say it is as great to be a woman as to be a man,  
And I say there is nothing greater than the mother of men.*

—WALT WHITMAN



BOSTON

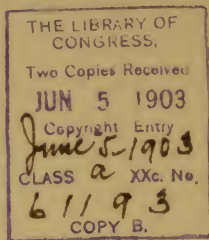
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A will, such as is described in the following pages, actually exists in the town of Northborough, Mass., although by its terms the interest on the bequest has not yet accumulated to the point which makes the awarding of a prize to the best mother in town possible. On publishing a brief account of it some years ago, the author received a number of responses from interested parties throughout the country.



# The Mothers



## Scene One

*An Open Square, surrounded by Public Buildings, Business Places, etc., etc. Enter Travelers and Citizens.*

*First Traveler.*

Well met are we to-day. Osmotherly  
No hearing has for strangers.

*Second Traveler.*

Say you well.  
By some abstraction does it seem bewitched,  
Trade is not in it.

*First Traveler.*

Duller never was.  
But now a boy I challenged, answered not;  
While Office-keepers, once to business bound,  
Absent themselves — 'A Festival,' says one;  
Another 'Festival'; the wonder being  
So staid a city should go daft like this.

*Citizen.*

What, man, are you a father?

*First Traveler.*

Father? No.  
A needless hurt, the saying of it here.

*Citizen.*

Take heart then. If child hungry you have been,  
The occasion's yours. In yonder Hall exhibited  
A hundred children, more or less, will be ;  
While the best mother by a Bench award  
With rich prize will be honored.

*First Traveler.*

Point so fine

Who can determine?

*Citizen.*

A committee chosen,  
Ten men and women, from the best of town.

*First Traveler.*

From such committee serving save me Heaven !

*Second Traveler.*

How did a theme so homely draw thus late  
The notice of last will and testament?  
And who the donor?

*Citizen.*

Dives Matthewson,  
Whose savings hurt him without lineal heirs,  
Who willed them to what most he honored, what  
Least honor has throughout the childless land,  
— Fair Motherhood. Shafts, arches, temples mark  
What place the Warrior has, the Statesman, Bard,  
— Those who, attended, in the public eye,  
Fight, legislate and sing. Service of all  
Most difficult, most useful to the State,  
The Mother's, had no monument till now.

By twenty years completed, see, it stands,  
The world's first tribute to its gift most rare.

*Second Traveler.*

How twenty years, and how completion, tell.

*Citizen.*

Why, money piled on money, heaping high,  
Till, the top sum reached, it goes to her  
Most worthy matron by her townsmen held.  
Yourself the judge, gaze round, compare, elect;  
Fine women, women fair to look upon,  
Arts, graces, and adornments counted in,  
You can find many. Shining at the rout,  
At Balls bewildering, pacing Fashion's pave,  
Men widen eyes to see them, everywhere  
Adorable. But matrons, ah, how many?  
Some mothers, without heart, unwilling; some,  
Believing, say, a lecturer's spoiled in them,  
—No more enamored of a childish need,  
No tenderer to its cry, than as if love,  
The woman's virtue, were left out of them.

*First Traveler.*

So Matthewson, patron of motherhood,  
Home's prophet, and the little children's friend,  
A saint would be and have a monument!  
I do believe in him, and hereby add  
My voice to those who hail him.

*Second Traveler.*

And I too.

In our town children at no altar pray,  
At no school parrotize, taught in the streets

The lessons the unmothered learn so well.

*First Traveler.*

Ours has a Forum, to Child Study given;  
Lectured and booked, tense women you may see  
Rapt in discussion. Come some riper day,  
God's instincts and the teaching babes no more  
Needed or known will be, so wise grows life,  
So learned.

*Third Traveler.*

Ours, a silent, peaceful town,  
Would please you so you know your nerves too well.  
Old men and women walk the shaded streets,  
Or start at footsteps slumberous afternoons.  
So long unwonted, they could hardly bear  
Child-laughter or too sudden shout of boys;  
Yet you may hear them 'plaining now and then  
The days degenerate, that, childless, mar  
The dear town's future.

*Citizen.*

Happiest town of all,  
So the test work, this one shall come to be;  
Its bright faced youth a contribution fair  
To Church, State, Business of the world, and all  
Part of what shall to-morrow happen here.

*First Traveler.*

Then on to-morrow trade and traffic wait.  
We'll tarry, brothers, once in life to see  
A Mothers' Festival.

*Second Traveler.*

We will.

*Third Traveler.*

We will.



## Scene Two

### *Court of the Examiners in the Great Hall*

*First Examiner.*

Hard fate here draws me who have left behind  
A suffering business.

*Second Examiner.*

But you serve the State.

*First Examiner.*

New fashions Duty has these later days.  
I, who love peace, must to the arena come,  
And, life in hand, between a hundred women  
Decide which is the best. Once in my youth  
I met an enemy in deadly fray,  
By him undaunted, see me tremble now.

*Second Examiner.*

My trouble is, test, measurement to find.  
'Best Mother' may have many meanings. One,  
Disliking children, her may highest rate  
Who farthest puts them from the public eye.  
Another, her who on a pedestal,  
Prim, white-faced, sets them, models of behavior.  
While most I favor, the broad, cosmic type,  
Fertile, free-natured, who to the good earth  
Intrust their offspring Give me a full brood,  
Wild running, unafraid of rain and dew,  
Nurtured in the great, soiling fields, in woods  
As unabashed as are the birds and bees.

*Third Examiner.*

How is it in your counting you leave out  
The Mother Ornamental, her of art  
And attitude, posing and picturesque?  
How fair in parlors round her silken knee  
Her one or two she gathers, and how well  
The little piece between them is played out!

*Fourth Examiner.*

Mothers *and* mothers! Let the child decide.  
Take suffrage of a fleet on Saturday,  
Who, drifting, lightly touch at many doors.  
Boys know the Mothers of the neighborhood;  
Kind words, smiles, tid-bits mark the happy port.  
Who ne'er a parlor knew will vote you one,  
Queen of the tribe, great homelike, loving soul.

*Woman Examiner.*

Easy it sounds, to hear descanting men,  
The part maternal in the world to play.  
Nor seems it strange the role by you is favored  
Who so much profit by it. *Mother* means,  
Of all the slaves enslaving man has known,  
The one most prone and willing. Wonder not  
One gave a prize for it, and all applaud.  
No *woman* yet e'er dedicated wealth  
In her poor sex to foster such a wrong.

*Second Examiner.*

Ah, heretic! 'Not woman,' dare you say?

*Woman Examiner.*

Not woman — save where only daughters are.  
Such prior and preemptive rights have boys,

Sisters know only half of motherhood.  
Talk *Father* and *they* better understand.

*First Examiner.*

'Then, if the children judge, rule out the girls.

*Woman Examiner.*

All save the girls unbrothered.

*Second Examiner.*

Blinder grows,  
More complicate, the issue. Must we bring  
From his Court Bench some grave and learned Judge,  
The knotted terms of this strange will to ravel,  
Ere we can know 'Best Mother,' what it is?

*Third Examiner.*

So would I have it.

*First Examiner.*

Not so I.

*Fourth Examiner.*

Nor I.

To me 'tis plain a mother is — a Mother.  
We all once knew one; patient, tender; sure,  
When others doubted, we had worth; a friend  
Once only found, and ever after missed  
With strange deep poignancy of missing. Speak,  
But speak the word, all o'er the lonesome world  
More tears start than at any other touch.  
I'll ask no other, no profounder test  
Than just blind loving on the children's part.

*Third Examiner.*

So take *dead* mothers, and the case grows plain.

The mother, never known, a halo wears,  
As much excels all mortals as a star,  
Distant in heaven, does outshine the earth.  
This at the outset let us set aside —  
'Tis living mothers here we're to reward.

*Second Examiner.*

Aye, living and prolific; not afraid  
Of burdens, and as free with hovering death  
As soldiers are. *She* shall our honor have.

*First Examiner.*

Such honor as have Kings. Strange runs the tale :  
Here in our People's Land, which highest rates  
The human, where all hopes of life abound,  
We least find life's expansion. Now and then  
A petted darling our fell care escapes ;  
Out of hot-houses and the fetid schools  
To manhood's stature grows. But mark us well,  
Regretful, hungry, a great people we, —  
While fecund Europe fills our empty lap.

*Second Examiner.*

The test, then?

*Fourth Examiner.*

To the hills and pastured fields !  
A shepherd find who tenderest folds the sheep.  
— You have the picture, 'tis as old as art,  
As Mother Church as precious. Hollowed arms,  
Bent face benignant, and a lamb between.  
'Tis but a Flock and one who safely guides.

*First Examiner.*

A knock. Who is it?

(Enter Joyce Bright.)

Entrance, little one —  
Your name and errand?

*Joyce Bright.*

Joyce, sir. Is it true  
A sum of money to the mother goes  
Who best deserves it?

*Second Examiner.*

So, 'tis as you say.

*Joyce.*

'T was told us on the street. If it be so,  
Six brothers, sisters, in a humble cottage,  
Lift to your notice its most precious Head.  
More gentle mother never was than ours.

*Second Examiner.*

So you, six brothers, sisters, in a court  
Decide the case. What put you to this step?

*Joyce.*

Our hearts, sir. Our six voices at the word,  
As one, said, 'Mother.' Think you chance there is  
She may be chosen?

*Second Examiner.*

Does she need it, child?

*Joyce.*

Oh, sorely.

*Second Examiner.*

Finds she time, then — being poor —  
And spirit lightness, the fond part to play?

*Joyce.*

Ever the same. Night, morning, noon, she is  
— The Mother. Here's a little paper signed,  
Three names, three wavering marks, to witness it.

*Second Examiner.*

Strange document, shaped in such childish heads !  
It shall have weight, believe me, little one.  
So tell your mother.

*Joyce.*

*She knows not I came.*

*Second Examiner.*

Surprise, then, is it? You the gold would take  
And drop it, presto, in her startled lap.  
We must think on it, child.

*Second Examiner.*

A model here  
And hint for judgment, friends, that nearer marks  
The spirit of the will than any yet.  
'Most children,' one says. 'Nay, the finest child,'  
Another. Third, 'a wild and healthy brood,  
Bare-footed, rugged, in the sun and rain,  
And native to the winds,' commends to us  
The elemental mother. To which goes  
Your wills consenting?

*Third Examiner.*

To the one, say I,  
Who love and wisdom most effectively  
Mixes in compound, be it two or ten  
Her charge is.

*Fourth Examiner.*

All of us say aye to it.

*Second Examiner.*

This then it is. To-day for canvassing,  
Final award to-morrow. Each your names,  
By facts supported, to the Judgment bring,  
The ballot to abide whate'er it be.



## Scene Three

*Court of the Mothers—Mrs. Goldfrank reading  
Plazard on the wall.*

'Here on the day appointed all assemble,  
First time to keep the Mothers' Festival.  
Be their home here who for contesting come;  
And here child-lovers, starvelings of the heart,  
On children from a hundred homes look down.  
Ten days hence we, the judges named below,  
A winner shall decree, a prize award.  
Assemble you who honor motherhood.'

*Mrs. Goldfrank.*

Fool was I to come hither, the old wound  
Fresh opening thus. These mothers opulent  
Their wealth will flaunt, while my lean poverty,  
Newly rebuked of them and doubly poor  
Will seem.

(Enter Mrs. Goodcheer and Mrs. Queary.)

*Mrs. Goodcheer.*

Ah, you a mother, too?

*Mrs. Goldfrank.*

If once

A mother, always makes one, call me such.  
Yet am I childless.

*Mrs. Goodcheer.*

Ah, forgive me, pray.

*Mrs. Goldfrank.*

If one so fortunate forgiveness needs  
Take mine.

*Mrs. Goodcheer.*

Yes, fortunate. Would you were too.

*Mrs. Goldfrank.*

Stripped of your fortune could you count life so?

*Mrs. Goodcheer.*

Stripped of the treasure Love once gives to us  
We cannot be. Oh, when into our hearts  
We take the tender plants, they grow and grow;  
Blight falls on them, they wither in the night,  
Cold winter comes, but, evermore renewed,  
They meet us at our waking, and we know  
What life is for us they determine still.

*Mrs. Goldfrank.*

Ten years then have I wasted. Colder years,  
More hungry, never fell upon the heart.  
Oh, I have held out aching arms, the void  
And emptiness with laughter mocking me;  
Till in the retrospect they seem a wrong  
Done my whole nature.

*Mrs. Queary.*

Not so fast and far!

See round you women, new in this our age,  
Who, restful, reach not arms out into air,  
Who prize their freedom. Cradles have I rocked;  
At partings felt the sharp edge of farewells;  
Domestic altars shattered I have seen,  
And household gods rude handled; yet, behold,  
Above the wrong and rupture of the world,  
Smiling I stand, a mother unsubdued  
By motherhood. Think you, unto me,

— My brood now scattered over earth and heaven —  
To me, contented, the great prize may come?

*Mrs. Goldfrank*

O monstrous mother! Stranger to my thought  
Than that light airy froth of womankind  
Who with pet poodles still love's deeper need.  
Old is your head, no ripeness of the heart  
I find in your confession. Oh, the sight,  
Sadder than weeping women, one like you,  
Dry-eyed and smiling, as a droughty sun  
Above the loss and hunger of the world!

*Mrs. Goodcheer.*

Hark! Sounds of singing from the inner Court.

#### SONG OF THE MOTHERS.

Oh Heavenly Father, Mother, how,  
As in Thy shadow we have stood,  
The love that burdens, blesses, Thou  
Hast taught us in Thy parenthood.

Giver Divine, who from Thine All  
No atom lovest, we would know  
How on the fields the showers fall,  
The fountain never running low.

Rapture and pain from Thee we own;  
From Thee effacing love we drew;  
And from Thine arm around us thrown,  
How to support and shield we knew.

Thy mandate we have kept. At night,  
Watching and waiting, we have learned

The meaning of the Primal Light  
Which at the world's first hearthstone burned.

Gay as the brook that blithely runs,  
Life met us at the threshold; yet  
The laughter of Thy little ones  
Took from our hearts the Great Regret.

Protect our homes. Thy chiding Hand  
Lay on our thoughts and deeds untrue.  
Black Self rebuke, and thro' the land  
The sacrificial flame renew.

*Mrs. Goldfrank.*

O singing Mothers! round the circling Globe  
Rises the song of thwarted womanhood,  
The lives that are as flotsam on the sea.  
I cannot hear you for the plaint and cry  
Of the vast sisterhood that walks alone.  
No prize man gives them, nor the prideful state  
That greatens to contest with sister state  
Earth's full possession.

*Mrs. Queary.*

Wrong your protest runs.  
Potent a magnet as dear childhood is,  
It draws but half the mothering of the world.  
'Tis given to dolls and dotage. Husbands are  
Both lords and children to the wives they love;  
While brothers, sisters, any who know need  
By any name, have learned to lean on it.

To be a woman in so weak a world  
Is to rule out all failure.

( Enter children.)

*Mrs. Goldfrank.*

Children, see!

The least of them refutes your argument.  
How fresh the room is and how bright, as if  
Sunshine and flowers had flooded it with them!  
See, one comes boldly, back another hangs,  
The shy, brave darlings! Find them happy room.  
O wise Testator, who a scene so fair  
Projected for us all!

*Mrs. Queary.*

Yet they grow up

As summer in a night to autumn turns,  
And autumn to cold winter, so one day  
We wake to silence and a narrowed home.  
Too brief youth's tenure for a trust so great,  
And such a fond dependence.

*Mrs. Goldfrank.*

None too great,

All sacrifice and service for the years  
They heap up with their gladness. Not for us,  
Support of our late weakness, do they come;  
But we for them. To keep God's childhood up,  
Maintain the gay procession, and forever  
See that joy fails not in this changeful world,  
Nought else excuses us for being here.

( Enter the Mothers; and, from the other side, Citizens, followed by the  
Examiners.)

Now that the mothers, now the people, come,  
The moment of Decision too draws near,  
When, crowning her good fortune, One shall be  
Of mothers named the best. Hear, now he speaks,  
He of the Judges who, outranking others,  
With stateliest step and bearing leads them in.

*First Examiner.*

Greeting for all who to this Hearing lend  
Presence and interest. Be it known to you  
That, after ripening the full term of years,  
The Will of Matthewson here comes to fruit.  
This little Daughter lifts now from our hands  
To her who wins it the first Mother's Prize.  
And Mistress Bright, who to the mother's part  
The father's adds, who tender is and strong,  
Brings to an end our searching of the town.  
You, who by sight or hearsay, know the home,  
The work, the woman, make our verdict sure.  
Who of our city mothers first shall be,  
Till next fruit drop from this late ripening tree?

*All.*

'Tis Mother Bright.

*First Examiner.*

Name and the day agree.  
Fair shines the sun this hour of our award;  
And fairer henceforth for it thro' the land  
The name and state of motherhood. Oh, poor  
Our prowess, if no Home behind us looms!  
Ever as masters we go forth at morn,  
How weak at eve returning. Soft hands then  
And clinging fingers of the little ones

Our conquest are. On this rare Honor Roll  
First of all names that after years shall write  
Stands then with your consenting Mother Bright.

*All,*

With our consenting stands Best Mother Bright.





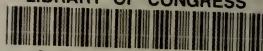








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